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Agenda Item 65 (k)
Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum*

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* This information was received after the submission of the main report.

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II. Replies received from States

Non-Aligned Movement

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[27 September 2004]

1. The Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) reaffirms the importance of the First Committee as a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly that deals with questions of disarmament and related international security questions. In this regard, NAM reiterates that the role of the First Committee, as part of the multilateral disarmament machinery, is of great importance.

2. NAM is of the view that any change in the disarmament agenda and the disarmament machinery, including the First Committee, will have to be made in the context of the fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament, taking into account that those were agreed by consensus at the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament in 1978. NAM is of the view that the improvement of the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee should be undertaken within the overall process of the revitalization of the General Assembly, in particular resolutions 58/126 of 19 December 2003 and 58/316 of 1 July 2004, and the reform of the United Nations as a whole, including the Security Council. In this regard, this process should not be detrimental to the right of all Member States to promote and defend their legitimate interests.

3. The issue of improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee has been an ongoing process since 1984. However, NAM believes that the main difficulties confronting the First Committee are not attributable primarily to the effectiveness or otherwise of its methods of work but, rather, to political considerations, particularly the lack of political will shown by some States to move forward with respect to matters of key importance for international peace and security, such as the issue of nuclear disarmament.

4. NAM considers it important that the duration of the work of the First Committee be maintained at five weeks as was the consensus a few years ago. Any further reduction of the duration would seriously diminish the importance, the relevance and the effectiveness of the Committee as the most representative multilateral body dealing with the issues of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

5. NAM emphasizes that disarmament and related international security issues should be considered in an integrated and comprehensive manner by the First Committee through the existing three stages, namely general debate, thematic/structured debate and consideration and action on draft resolutions.

6. NAM further emphasizes that it is the right of each State or groups of Member States to submit resolutions and to determine their most appropriate periodicity. In this regard, the biennialization or triennialization of resolutions of the First Committee may be considered, provided that it is voluntarily initiated and based upon a request by their sponsors. NAM supports the position that the consideration of issues in groups of items or clusters (10 clusters) as has been done for the past few years should be maintained. Similarly, a rearrangement of items under clusters

may be considered in order to facilitate a structured/thematic debate, without prejudging their substance.

7. NAM believes that measures such as the early election of the Bureau, convening more interactive debates, having more concise, focused and action oriented resolutions, and establishing an appropriate mechanism for following up on the implementation of resolutions and decisions would also improve the working methods of the First Committee.

8. Similarly, NAM is in favour of setting aside more time for holding informal consultations, in which all interested delegations may participate, on draft resolutions already submitted or yet to be submitted to the First Committee.

9. Finally, NAM is convinced that without the necessary political will to implement resolutions or decisions, any efforts to improve the methods of work of the First Committee will have no substantive impact on the efforts to achieve general and complete disarmament under effective international control, in particular nuclear disarmament.

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General and complete disarmament: improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

Report of the Secretary-General

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* The information in the present addendum was received after submission of the main report.

04-53848 (E) 181004

II. Replies received from States

Japan

[Original: English]
[1 October 2004]

Basic position

1. In order for the First Committee to fulfil its role, improvement of its functioning and its revitalization through concrete reform is essential. Each year, nearly 60 resolutions are submitted; however, there remains ample room for improving their effective implementation and thus the overall functioning of the First Committee.

2. It should be noted that each country's disarmament and non-proliferation interests are intricate and complex, each country has differing priorities and the roles of various forums differ. As each country is in a different security environment, hence the varying number and content of resolutions, we must also take into account this complex international environment when aiming towards the reduction of the number of resolutions. Thus, rather than having a sweeping reduction as our only aim, reforming methods of work should be our main focus and the number of resolutions should be reduced accordingly, in an effective manner.

3. In the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, certain issues enjoy very little divergence among Member States. The time and financial resources made available as a result of this reform should be directed to such priority issues, bearing in mind that our work should be results-oriented.

4. If we are aiming for substantial and prompt reform of the First Committee, one idea would be to establish a working group for focused discussion by interested parties within the limits of existing resources.

Specific points

5. While, in principle, Japan supports the proposal put forward by the United States, the United Nations should not undermine the right of Member States to address freely issues they consider important. Also, since new matters can be taken up by the United Nations along with changes in the international security environment, any improvements on substantial working methods of resolutions must be founded on a "voluntary basis".

Administrative reform methods

6. The overall reform of the First Committee is important; however, a realistic approach must be taken, focusing on steps that have a comparatively high possibility of being realized, such as the punctual convening of meetings, a shorter and more focused general debate and shortening of the adoption period. In more concrete terms, the following steps should be adopted without delay at this year's First Committee meeting:

- Exercise punctuality when opening meetings
- Establish the practice of a "rolling" list of speakers

- Conclude the general debate within the first week of the annual session. To achieve this, Member States would agree to speak for a maximum of 5 minutes to highlight key elements of national statements. This could be facilitated by the use of a green/amber/red light. Where delegations wished to present a more detailed statement of over 5 minutes, this would be submitted in writing.

7. The filing deadline for resolutions could remain as it stands. As suggested by the United States, to encourage the development of consensus, the filing deadline for the tabling of draft resolutions and decisions could be left to the last day of the second week of each annual session. However, in order to reduce the duration of the First Committee or number of resolutions, the deadline should remain as it stands, or be advanced. Of course there is also the problem that if the deadline is too early, depending on the State, some States may not have enough preparation time. Taking the foregoing into consideration, keeping the status quo could be considered appropriate.

8. Japan strongly advocates the limiting, rationalization and consolidation of the number of studies and reports, as this would reduce the administrative burden and cost. Particular attention should be given to the cost of studies that are undertaken. However, setting a numerical target is not appropriate.

9. Bureau members should be elected well in advance. In concrete terms, the process should be started immediately following the conclusion of this year's First Committee, or even during the Committee on an informal basis, so that we can begin work in the lead up to next year's First Committee as smoothly and quickly as possible.

Substantive improvement of resolutions

10. The following measures are encouraged:

(a) Refrain from adding to resolutions or decisions the traditional operative paragraph automatically placing an item on the agenda of the General Assembly for the following year;

(b) Resolutions adopted by consensus whose content changes little from year to year should be submitted once every two to three years, where possible. However, this should be left up to each State to determine of their own accord;

(c) Institute automatic "sunset" provisions for all United Nations activities generated by the First Committee and/or resolutions requiring concrete action, thereby ensuring periodic review;

(d) Request the Secretariat to review and improve the smoothness and rapidity of the programme budget implications projection process, with a view to reducing unnecessary confusion with regard to programme budget implications-related resolutions. Work towards improving the accuracy of the programme budget implications projections and increasing the advance notice provided to the Member States regarding the financial implications of draft resolutions and decisions. Also, Member States considering submitting programme budget implications-related resolutions should cooperate and communicate with the Secretariat well in advance to facilitate the process;

(e) Concerning the merging of resolutions, in principle, this should be entrusted to each State. This would not need to be applied automatically to fields

where there is ample room for large differences in positions or Member States taking different approaches (e.g. nuclear disarmament);

(f) We cannot support placing a numerical limit on the number of resolutions submitted per year. In relation to the numerical target, we should take into account whether the resolutions are submitted every other year, or every third year. Also, if this limit were too severe, difficulties would arise as to who has the authority and what kind of standards to discourage the submission of the resolutions or encourage the merger. The question of giving judgement over the reduction or merging of resolutions would need to be clearly decided beforehand; however, we believe consensus over such standards and rights would be extremely difficult to reach. The resulting discussion would be long and thus contrary to the aims of the reform process. Therefore we do not believe this should be pursued;

(g) Japan advocates a progressive and practical approach towards the realization of nuclear disarmament. Based on this notion, each year Japan submits a resolution to the General Assembly entitled "A path to the total elimination of nuclear weapons". Japan received overwhelming support and understanding during extensive discussions with various countries conducted in the lead-up to the submission of this resolution and believes that this long-standing process itself has an important weight which cannot be denied.

Improvement of the agenda

11. Classification of the agenda could be pursued to stimulate active discussion and the rationalization of discussion. However, the extent to which streamlining the agenda would be advantageous compared to the current practice of thematical clustering should be further examined.

Time frame of the meeting

12. According to the above-mentioned suggestions for improvement, we should aim to reduce the overall time frame of the existing meeting from five to four weeks. This could be achieved by the anticipated reduction in the number of resolutions or a reduction in the length of the general presentations.